S:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1938 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

[12] [13] twenty miles from Lake Nyasa (1,300 feet). A little compact country, secluded until very recently from any effective external contacts, slightly over 1,000 square miles in extent.[1]

[32] [34] [36] The soil, particularly that of the higher ground in the north of the Nyakyusa country, is not in itself very rich, but, as between 100 and 130 inches of rain usually fall each year, the district is one of the most fertile in the whole of Tanganyika; two crops a year are often grown on the same patch of ground, and the African population is over eighty to the square [28] mile. There is no infected tsetse fly and cattle are the most prized possession of the Nyakyusa.

63 For historical reasons, which we will discuss in a later section, the Nyakyusa have never been united under any one paramount chief of their own, but live in a number (nearly 100 at the present day) of tiny but traditionally independent chiefdoms. For these chiefdoms the numerous streams which run down from the north into Lake Nyasa and the crests of the ridges of land between them, form natural boundaries.

[33] [39] The country, of course, is not all of equal economic value, parts of it are stony and mountainous, other parts, and particularly the plain in the south, consist of deep and level soil; and the population is heavier on the plain than on the higher ground. Further, on the higher ground, there exist numerous old volcanic craters filled with rich moist soil and these, [24] being more fertile than the surrounding land, are particularly valued by the Nyakyusa. Again, of the two chief economic crops of this district, one, coffee, can only be grown on the higher ground while the other, rice, can only be grown on or near the plain. And at every point their system of land tenure is partially determined by such physical factors as these.

3. *THE USES AND VALUE OF LAND*

31 The Nyakyusa use their land for building on, for agriculture, for pasture, for hunting and fishing; they collect firewood, reeds, thatching-grass, mushrooms and other wild vegetables there; they draw water from its streams and bathe daily in them; on their land they grow bamboos, bananas, *isinyungati* trees[2] and coffee; they keep bees; they dance, they fight, they walk and lie down upon it; their land is both the receptacle of refuse and the location of religious ritual, while their doctors continually wander over its surface in search of magical medicines.

Not all these uses of land give rise to laws, moral rules or conventions, but only those uses which tend to lead men into conflict with one another or into mutual embarrassment. The only reasons for the existence of

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[1] The whole of Rungwe District is 1,866 square miles, but this includes the hills of the Nkuli and Lambya as well.

[2] I have not been able to discover the botanical name of this tree.

Bl:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 F3017 Ngonde F3017
Nyakyusa

the river is sparse during the wet season, although here and there a few plots have cultivated on slightly raised ground. Similarly in Kapogi village, Kaswa's chiefdom, some parts are heavily inundated by the Kiwira river. In both these cases flooding has made unstable ground which was cultivated and even built on a generation ago; the degree of annual flooding seems to be decreasing again now so that very slowly a certain amount of new land is becoming available. This cyclical change appears to be directly connected with the long-term rise and fall of the level of Lake Nyasa. On the other hand, in more fortunate villages such as Ibala, Mwakyusa's chiefdom, and Kapogi, Mwaseumangale's chiefdom, there is rather more common pasturage remaining, and village sites, paths, etc., are noticeably less restricted.

The following arithmetical observations may be noted as permitting, perhaps, some guide to population densities in the Lake Plains:-

Persons per sq. mile	Land average per family of five	Arable holdings per family of five if proportion of total land under arable holdings is:-	
		one-third	two-fifths
100	10.7	3.6	4.3
200	5	1.7	2.0
300	3.6	1.1	1.4
400	2.7	0.8	1.1

(N.B. The statistically average family is composed of five people)

It has been suggested by the Agricultural Field Officer, Tukuyu, that for the whole of Rungwe District perhaps 30 per cent. of all land is under cultivation. He was not prepared to place any reliance on this figure, and certainly for the Lake Plains it must be higher.

To summarise my own tentative conclusions and in order to obtain some kind of picture of the current land situation, I suggest the following division into regions:-

A. The flood plains proper

1. Very high-density region - the arable land available under present conditions amounts to about 1½-2 acres per adult male and the local density of population is probably in the region of 300 persons per square mile: - in most of the chiefdoms of Mwaseumba, Korono and Lazarus, the south-eastern part of Mwakipesile's and the eastern part of Mwakyusa's chiefdoms.

2. High-density region - there is available about 3 acres of arable land per adult male and the local density of population is between 300 and 400 persons per square mile: - in the chiefdoms of Mwaseumangale, Mwanyilo and Mwakilima, the southern part of Mwakilasa's, the centre of Mwakyusa's and much of Mwaseumale's chiefdoms.

B. The remainder of the Lake Plains (Ufuteia)

1. Low-density region - here there remains much vacant land (some usable, some scarcely usable) and population density is probably little over 100 persons per square mile, and even lower than that in the most northerly parts: - the northern, higher areas comprising the north of Mwakyusa's (Mwisale's) chiefdom, the remainder of Mwaseumale's, the whole of Mwaseumale's, Mwakatumbu's and Mwakipesile's chiefdoms, together with the northern part of Mwakipesile's and of Mwakilasa's chiefdoms.

This summary description is, and can be, only very approximate, taking no account of the complexity of local variations to be seen on the ground. It is illustrated in the accompanying sketch-map.

It may be emphasised that in the two high-density regions practically all available land is in use. In the "high-density region" (No. 2 above) it may be possible to reduce slightly the non-productive areas taken up by village sites, but nowhere will this be easy or even desirable, and already most of the vacant spaces between houses are packed with banana groves, small

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

plots of maize, aquashes, tobacco, etc., and useful trees (bamboo, citrus-mango, kapok, soyagapi and firewood). Artificial drainage would, of course, make more land available along the rivers, but this is in general beyond the abilities and resources of the Nyakyusa without considerable outside assistance.

Finally, in this matter it is to be remembered that in addition to a man's arable holding, each of his wives has a banana plot at her house from which she obtains her staple foodstuff. Such plots amount to perhaps about a tenth of an acre on the average. On the other hand, the Nyakyusa are no longer prepared to tolerate a predominantly banana diet. Rice has, in most areas of the Lake Plains, become almost as important as bananas.

Large-sized Holdings

Some blame for this novel shortage of land and the smallness of the average holding has often been laid upon that minority of Nyakyusa who have exceptionally large holdings, and also upon the immigrants from beyond the Lake Plains who have come to settle there during the past decade.

The occupiers of large-sized holdings are rather fewer than has sometimes been supposed. The minority of large land-owners, such as some of the modern chiefs with as much as 25-30 acres, has brought more attention to them than is really warranted. Most chiefs and village headmen have arable holdings of above average size, as a result of their privileged positions in the land allocation system and because of their prestige influence; but they remain a small minority and their number is bound to decrease in the future as inheritance causes sub-division of their holdings, for most of them have also more than the average number of wives and sons. In the two high-density regions it is clearly impossible for any man much to increase his present holding. As will be shown later (see page 24) the modern trend is not unnaturally towards a dangerous fragmentation of holdings.

The data obtained in this manner for my eight village samples are summarised in Table III, page 15. In those villages the two men out of 372 who held more than ten acres were a village headman and the father of a chief.[1] There were seven other headmen and one chief as well as some other locally influential men amongst the people covered by my surveys, but none of them held more than ten acres. There are, of course, some commoners amongst the large land-holders; many of them are close relatives of the chief or headman and have thus received preferential treatment. Some, however, are ordinary villagers who were perspicacious enough to see future trends and to obtain land in the early days before most men realised its new value and when vacant areas were still easily available. Such men are tending to become a new, wealthy class, but on the other hand they are particularly susceptible to the begging of kinsmen and friends who have insufficient land. If they are not to be regarded as unneighbourly or even anti-social (perhaps practising witchcraft) they are virtually compelled to be generous sometimes, both with their land and with their profits.

On the whole this minority of men excites little attention or jealousy among the Nyakyusa, who indeed take it for granted that their chiefs and headmen will have more land than ordinary villagers, as befits their status and prestige. If it be thought that by reducing somehow the size and number of these unusually large holdings then the land shortage might be partly relieved, it is a false hope. I scarcely think that the Nyakyusa would welcome any such attempt at interference by administrative action, but in any case it would only provide minor and temporary relief here and there and would not be worth the executive difficulties involved.

1. The second man should be a chief himself but he was dismissed by Government on his reappointment to the position. He still holds much of the prestige and privilege of a chief but his rule is only allowed indirectly in purely local government affairs.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 F'017 Ngonde F'017
Nyakyusa

The Problem of Immigrant Land-holders

Undue importance has also been given to immigrants, but their numbers are relatively small and only significant locally. Since about 1948, or a little earlier, there has been an influx of Africans into the Lake Plains: – Nyakyusa from the Highlands (chiefly from the Central Region – Poroto), Ndali from the Ndali Highlands of Rungwe District and Kinga from the Njombe District to the east beyond the Livingstones; from northern Nyasaland have come Ndali, Lambia and Sukwa, and there are also small numbers of Bemba and others from Northern Rhodesia. They have been attracted in the modern era, when local movement is easier, by the possibility of obtaining land in the northern Lake Plains, where rainfall is so high and untouched bushland has been available.[1]

These immigrants have been and continue to be almost entirely restricted to the north in the "low-density region" (see map, facing page 11). This contained the outstandingly empty area of the country and still there remain vacant lands to be taken up. Such land is usually of relatively inferior quality, easily subject to erosion and loss of fertility on the slopes of the foothills and unsuitable for paddy cultivation except in small, isolated basins. The immigrants, that is, have settled in areas rejected by most Nyakyusa. There, locally, the newcomers outnumber the indigenous population. In the flood plains, the high-density regions, the proportions of foreigners cannot be more than one or two per cent. of the population, and in most villages there are none at all.

It is true that these newcomers do occupy land which might well be used to relieve the congestion nearer to the Lake; but in practice this would not be at all easy. To take a single example: the newly opened area in the north of the chiefdom of Mwakyusa between the Kiwira and Songwe rivers is being rapidly taken up by Ndali from the north-west, Nyasalanders and Nyakyusa from the Central Region (in that order of numerical importance). A few miles to the south, in the centre of the same chiefdom, the inhabitants of the Ikolo area consistently refuse to move although they manifestly cannot meet their land needs within their present villages. They, and others like them, say with some truth that paddy cultivation is less easy and less profitable in these newer and higher areas, and that poor communications make the disposal of produce more difficult. They also say, but more often leave to inference, that they are unwilling to leave their traditional village areas and begin in new parts, even though the move required is only one of a few miles. They have not yet become sufficiently aware of the permanent gravity of modern land shortage to overcome their parochial inertia. By the time they do become aware of it the opportunity may well be lost, for immigrants continue to arrive in twos and threes, and the last vacant land may be taken. To date, however, some vacant lands remain, albeit of poor quality, into which the densely packed Nyakyusa could move, and the immigrants cannot be blamed, at least not yet, for preventing the expansion and resettlement of the local population.

At the moment the chiefs and headmen in these northerly areas are keen to obtain as many of these immigrants as possible in order to swell the number of their commoners, the size of their villages and thus, directly, their own prestige and importance. Newcomers have every opportunity to be allocated as much land as they wish, where they wish, and[1] many are liberally assisted with food in the traditional way until they harvest their first crop. I heard no complaints from either the local Nyakyusa or the immigrants, and relations seemed to be good. Strangers must conform to Nyakyusa ways of life and to the authority of the headmen and chief, although

1. Immigrants from Nyasaland are said to have come following the introduction of new regulations there prohibiting the cultivation of easily eroded hill areas.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1956 F317 Ngonde F317
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Briefly to summarize the contemporary land situation: in the Lake Plains it may be said that in the main the traditional land tenure system and land law still continue as the basis of native land holding today. The essential feature in recent years has been the severe land shortage in relation to arable needs under the current system of agriculture. Village unity and village exclusiveness have been increased and so also has the authority of the village headman in his control and allocation of land rights. Security of tenure has been strengthened, if anything, and one of the most important methods of obtaining land is now by inheritance. The new law establishing inheritance from father to sons, whilst generally acceptable to the people, is producing a number of civil suits which form the greatest proportion of the more important land cases before the local courts.

The shortage of land is principally the result of increased demands for paddy (i.e. cash crop) cultivation, although the population appears to be increasing slowly. In the high density regions almost all men have considerably less land than they could cultivate, especially under the impetus of the *ox-plough*, with the developing desires for money income. In the low density regions of the low foothills there is still some vacant or partly utilized land, though of very inferior quality for paddy cultivation. The shortage hits the younger men severely, and many of them cannot obtain land at all until the death or senility of their fathers. Fragmentation and dispersion of holdings is rapidly becoming serious and without check.

The first question which arises is whether anything can be done to ease the pressure of population on the country by making more land available, or by making its distribution more equitable.

The thinly populated parts of the northern region of the Lake Plains offer a meagre solution only, for the country is raised above the level of the flood plains and is often broken and hilly. Fertility is low, erosion is a constant danger and the paddy yield (if obtainable at all) is poor. Nyakyusa from the densely populated areas to south and east are therefore most unwilling to move there. In any case the available land, which remains safely and economically open to cultivation, is filling up fairly quickly – mainly by immigration. Certainly I do not think that it can supply sufficient space to meet modern needs. There is, however, no reason why immigrants should make a difficult situation worse, and therefore it is suggested that further immigration from outside the Lake Plains should be *carefully controlled* if not altogether prevented. Indubitably outsiders (almost entirely Nyakyusa from the Highlands) who hold land without permanent residence should be prohibited and their holdings reallocated to local inhabitants.

As I have already indicated (page 17), I do not think that the problem of men who hold unusually large acreages is particularly serious. Such large holdings are relatively few and will be inevitably split up by inheritance on the deaths of the present occupiers.

In the flood plains proper there is, so far as I am aware, extremely little new land which could be brought under cultivation. Mechanical assistance in the clearance of dense reed thicket[1] and in drainage schemes would produce

1. These areas of thicket are heavily inundated in the wet season but, if cleared, could be used for a dry season crop.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[7-234 B]

WANYAKYUSA AGRICULTURE

[illegible]

[132] some rain falls every month in the part north of Tukuyu. Very heavy rains occur at times, such as in 1931 when 120 inches are recorded on the lake shore in the month of April. In November, 1942, 12½ inches fell in eighteen hours in Tukuyu. The average mean temperature for Tukuyu is 23.6°C. The range is low while monthly variation average is only 5.4°C.

Soils and Vegetation

[134] The district may be divided into three sections according to soil and vegetation types. [135] The higher altitudes to the north are dominated geologically by the extinct volcanic range extending round Rungwe Mountain. The dark soil, composed of decaying vegetable matter overlying volcanic ash in varying layers, is, generally speaking, fairly fertile, depending on [137] the age of the subsoil. The vegetation is dominated by rain forest, though much of this has been destroyed. Grass (*Hyparrhenia* spp. *Digitaria horizontalis*, *Setaria* and *Cymbopogon* spp., with high *Sorghum* and *Dissanthelium* shrub on the slopes of the mountain range, are found with *Millettia*, *Ficus* and *Cissus* spp., and occasional stretches of bamboo on the hill sides and in the river beds and ravines. To the west of Tukuyu, woodlands of *Brachystegia*, associated with *Albizzia* and *Parkia* spp., cover such areas as are not cultivated and where the grasses (*Hyparrhenia* and *Digitaria* spp.) can only be burnt during October owing to the wet climate.

[134] In the medium altitudes south of Tukuyu, the soil is a red clay loam, derived from granite with intrusions of dolerite, diorite, basalt and quartz. It is in the area of these soils that hot springs, lime, coal and mica occur. This part is heavily wooded with [135] *Brachystegia* associated with *Albizzia*, *Dalbergia*, *Ficus*, *Cissus* spp. and *Chlorophora excelsa*, but is at present being gradually cut [137] out to make room for cultivation. No forests of economic value occur, except for fuel, small quantities of wild rubber vine, *Landolphia* spp., which have become of value in wartime, and some pockets of *Adina microcephala*. Dominant grasses are *Imperata cylindrica*, *Digitaria*, and *Hyparrhenia* spp.

[134] The lower altitudes below 2,000 feet are [135] situated in a wide plain along the northern and western shores of Lake Nyasa, and this is composed of soils mostly transported from the highlands. These are extremely fertile. The sub-[137] soil is granite and the top soil varies greatly

in thickness.

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cattle in the district in the 1941 census was about 2.3 head per taxpayer or 35 head per square mile. Certain land is set aside each year for grazing, where stock is not able to interfere with the produce plots. Compensation for trespass of cattle on cultivated land is only paid among people of the lake shore.

Parts of the land to the west of Tukuyu have been badly eroded by cultivation and over-grazing, and it is only since 1935 that anti-erosion rules have been made to check the tendency for bad cultivation. Since they were brought in, however, the majority of the tribe have become very keen on seeing the effect that well-controlled cultivation has on crops. The following are the Native Authority Rules concerning anti-erosion:—

"Throughout the Rungwe District, all natives shall follow orders regarding cultivation designed to prevent soil erosion as demonstrated and explained by the Agricultural Officer.

(a) All ridges and terraces shall be contoured and not follow the slope of the hill.

(b) In the case of cultivation done on the flat and not on ridges or terraces, a large ridge and ditch shall be dug at the top of the plot to remain permanently and be repaired from time to time."

The Wanyakyusa have never been dependent on outside sources for any of their food, but in their own territory there is no iron for making hoes nor clay for making earthenware pots. The former they were accustomed to get from Ukinga, on the eastern boundary of the district in the Livingstone mountains, and the pots were, and are still, made only by about 300 members of the Wakisi tribe living in a village on the lake shore at the extreme south-western point of the district. The Wakisi are really of Ukinga origin and inhabit the eastern, northern and western shores of Lake Nyasa. They grow no food except cassava, and that only recently, and apart from the one village that makes the pots, their only work is as paddlers of canoes and fishermen. Most of their fish and pots are exchanged for food.

Since the Tukuyu District is so thickly populated and the inhabitants concentrated, it has been found necessary to create produce markets at comparatively short distances. Transport from these markets, during wartime, has become difficult. The natural outlet for Tukuyu native foodstuffs is the Lupa Goldfields, which lie about 180 miles to the

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438 north. Before the war, the goldfields gave work
316 to about 15,000 natives, chiefly Wanyakyusa,
[450] and most of the foodstuffs from this district
went there. The goldfields are gradually closing
due to difficulties in obtaining spares, and it
has been necessary to look for outlets for
Tukuyu produce elsewhere. Should the gold-
fields open again after the war, and large-
scale mining start, there is a great future for
produce grown in Tukuyu.

434 The main income of the tribe is derived
from agricultural, military, mining and public
works sources, and it is estimated that in 1941
the average annual income per man, woman
and child was about Sh. 10 per year. It has
risen considerably since, as over 4,000 men
have joined the military and a large part of
their salaries comes back to the district in the
form of remittances. The agricultural source,
[441] from which a larger part of the tribal income
accrues, is from sales of rice, maize and other
foodstuffs. A fair number of Wanyakyusa also
work on the tea plantations.

241 The picture sketched above will show that
the district is inhabited by a tribe whose agri-
culture is of great interest, since the variety
of crops, from wheat in the highlands to
paddy and cotton on the lake shore, is perhaps
unrivalled in so small an area elsewhere in
191 East Africa. It has not been possible to fill in
the picture with details of the people's
character, but it is worth mentioning that the
Wanyakyusa are a people difficult to ad-
minister, argumentative, litigious, self-willed
153 and at times inclined to truculence. Nevertheless
their intelligence is such that they are
willing to be persuaded, and, once convinced
of the benefit of any change, adopt it with
energy. This is instanced by the way they have
in a few years accepted the principles of soil-
erosion to such an extent that now there is
perhaps 90 per cent control in the well-popu-
lated areas. It should, however, be stressed
• 134 that, though the soil is not being eroded to
241 any great extent, it is still being impoverished,
since increased cultivation for the war effort
has involved breaking a great deal of new land
with a consequent lessening of fallow. Over-
cropping in the hilly country is very great and,
[195] in order to prevent further emigration, it be-
hoves the native planters to learn to put some-
thing back into the soil in the form of mulch
or compost. If care is not taken, a comparat-
ively prosperous country will one day become
like so many parts of Africa, where a losing
struggle is fought with Nature to obtain a
sufficiency for the people's needs.

on 21st September, 1943